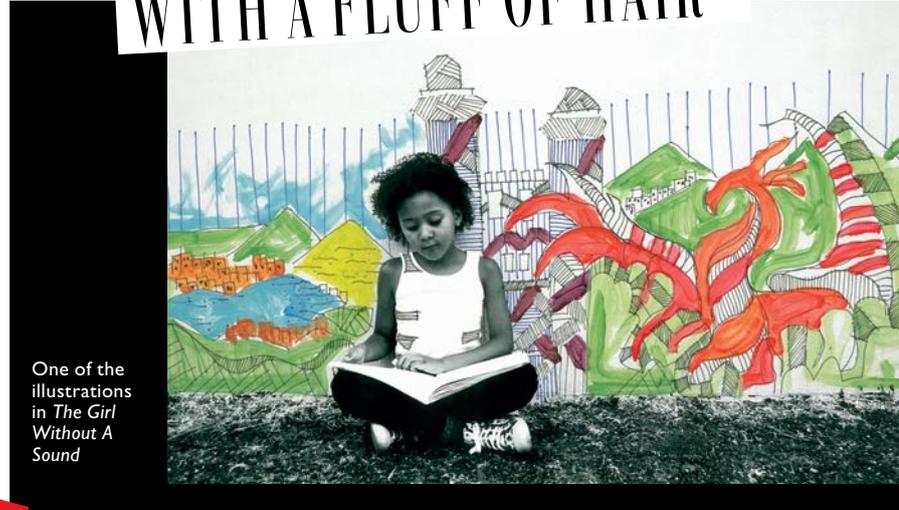




Representation is important, says author and actress **Buhle Ngaba**

## REWRITING THE FUTURE WITH A FLUFF OF HAIR



One of the illustrations in *The Girl Without A Sound*

**“ONCE UPON A VERY** long time ago, there was a little girl with a fluff of hair” is the opening sentence of a fairytale for black girls I wrote earlier this year. At the time, I didn’t realise that *The Girl Without A Sound* would resonate so deeply in the wake of the Pretoria High School for Girls protests.

I wrote *The Girl Without A Sound* because growing up, I loved reading – but whenever I picked up a fairytale, I could never find any characters in it who looked like me. It made me feel completely dismissed and unseen. I wanted to create a world in which women of colour can be the protagonists in stories written for them and by them.

If we don’t give kids the opportunity to see how they might exist in worlds created by imagination, then how can we expect them to imagine themselves as doctors, actors or billionaires beyond whatever circumstances they might be in? If you see yourself in a story’s narrative, you begin to imagine your place in a world much bigger than you. Then you might begin to imagine how you might conquer that world.

Those are the kinds of stories I needed most, and so those are the kinds of stories I tell onstage and on paper. I wrote *The Girl Without A Sound* as a healing balm for my own body in a racist and patriarchal society, yes – but

also as a gift for my aunt, because I had no money to buy one.

I didn’t realise how necessary this story was, until I saw the overwhelming love it received from women of colour. I think this might be the book we didn’t know we needed as young black girls – a reflection of ourselves.

A code of conduct that excludes young women of colour from wearing their hair naturally – even deems it “exotic” – is like the narratives of exclusion that have erased the black female body throughout history and continue to do so. The only way we can be seen is by adopting an appearance that isn’t our own. Surely, young girls need to be given the choice to wear their hair in all its natural glory without it being deemed a political or violent act?

In light of the protests, I look at my own schooling career and acknowledge that girls like us are still fighting this fight, but there’s an essential difference – they are so much louder than we were. I dedicated *The Girl Without A Sound* to the ones with moonlight in their skins – I hoped it would spark action towards change. If we keep using our voices and writing our own stories, transformation will come – and as the little girl in the story says, “Even the tiniest of things breathe and live and change the shape of the world somewhere.” ■

### #BLACKGIRLMAGIC

The afro has always been power



**Diana Ross**

**Erykah Badu**



**Jill Scott**

**Amandla Stenberg**



**Solange Knowles**